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Changing Meanings of “German” in Habsburg Central Europe

◆ Pieter M. Judson ◆

How might we usefully examine the relations between German and non-German communities in Eastern Europe during the nineteenth century without imposing a modern nation-centered perspective on those relations? How did German communities or individuals differentiate themselves from their non-German neighbors, if at all? More importantly, how did popular understandings of what it meant to be a German (or German-speaking) change during the nineteenth century? And how did such ideas about national identity become the basis for a cultural and social politics of separation within and among communities in many parts of Eastern Europe? This essay tries to suggest some useful ways of thinking about German-speakers, their changing conceptions of themselves and of their non-German-speaking neighbors in the broad geographic region known as East Central Europe during the long nineteenth century (1789–1914), using examples drawn primarily from the Habsburg Monarchy. In particular the essay contrasts conceptual changes about identity among nationalists to the ongoing realities of daily life in multilingual regions, demonstrating unevenness in the development of a consistent, coherent, and popular German national identity. By the end of the nineteenth century German nationalist media, politicians and organizations all framed daily life in the region in terms of ongoing battles among nations. They attributed local incidents of violence to nationalist animosities and portrayed the local world in terms of nationalist conflict. Yet despite their best efforts the nation remained an object of indifference, ambivalence, and only occasional interest among most inhabitants of East Central Europe.

During the nineteenth century, ideas about national identity first became politicized and popularized among large, socially diverse populations.¹ This process was anything but predictable or linear in nature, nor did it take place in a consistent or similar manner across the region. Despite the claims of nationalists to the contrary, the process did not reflect deeper transhistorical features somehow embedded in the

region or in the peoples who have inhabited it. The particular character of local society produced particular local beliefs about national identity, and these often varied widely within broadly defined national communities. Considering oneself to be a German in one part of Eastern Europe, for example, might involve a completely different set of shared or imagined qualities than it did in another part of Eastern Europe.

For social scientists, journalists, and politicians, the challenge of defining who was considered a German national and what political meanings that label conveyed appeared to be solved only by the end of the First World War. Post-1918 European governments increasingly categorized their populations according to particular ethnic attributes, often as a means to determine which groups should enjoy the full rights of citizenship. State policies that linked the full exercise of citizenship rights to membership in a national community helped to popularize national identities among their own populations even more. By the mid-twentieth century, radical policies of ethnic cleansing, discrimination against linguistic or religious minorities, and wholesale expulsions, not to mention genocide, had indelibly imprinted formerly abstract categories on the experiences, relationships, and self-understandings of many Europeans, including the inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe.

Since our period largely predates the twentieth-century introduction of identity cards, official systems of national ascription or ethnic attribution, it is far more difficult to determine which people considered themselves to be German or German national in the nineteenth century and what exactly they meant by that label.² On the other hand, those practices of ethnic or national attribution that underlay twentieth-century government policies certainly developed from ways of thinking about large populations that had originated in the second half of the nineteenth century. Such ways of thinking about populations—in terms of ethnically or linguistically defined nations—in turn originated both at the level of state policy and at the level of popular social movements. They resulted both from state centralization initiatives—often not immediately concerned with determining national belonging—and in many regions from a rise of popular participation in local, regional, and state politics. In this essay I try to suggest how these varied factors taken together produced new understandings of identity, often making those identities into the basis of new forms of politics. After an introductory discussion I propose to analyze debates about the meaning of nation from the Austrian half of the Habsburg Monarchy, drawn from two particular moments: the revolutions of 1848 and the end of the nineteenth century, when politics became both nationalized and popular in character.

Nation itself was a relatively recent form of popular self-identification in the nineteenth-century world. The term “nation” meant many things in 1789, but few of these approached the mass-oriented ethnic, linguistic, religious, or territorial understandings of the term that had become standard by 1914. Some early-nineteenth-century definitions of nations, such as the Magyar or Polish, referred quite specifically to the

traditional privileges enjoyed by corporately defined social groups within a polity. In cases such as these "the nation" referred to the gentry and aristocracy of a given state or province. Yet the restless century of industrialization, urbanization, increased communication, consumption, and movement in Europe produced a considerable expansion of the literate public, an explosion of popular media, and the rapid growth of mass politics in the region. These developments both informed and transformed the very meanings of terms like "Magyar," "Polish," and "German," as such terms came to apply to entire populations rather than to specific social groups. Thus the nineteenth-century context of growing mass political involvement helped to produce the ambition both among nationalist activists and some regimes to realize the nation in every individual.³

In many parts of Europe imperial regimes had often relied on corporate-based alliances with local elites to impose their rule more effectively among their diverse territories, as, for example, with the Russian government's relationship to Baltic German-speaking communities. During the nineteenth century, however, many regimes turned increasingly to the use of linguistic, religious, or national categories as a way to impose more centralized and consistent forms of administrative rule over local populations. For the centralizing regime, often absolute in its pretensions, the quality of rule, so to speak, had to be consistent and universal, no matter the type of subject to which it was applied. Liberal theory too demanded a legal equality and equivalent treatment among all subjects of a ruler. Both of these developments could well make use of the more universal idea of nation, or even of religion or cultural tradition, as a means of reforging links between government and local society. Clearly none of these newer concepts (nation, religion, culture) was actually universal in scope when applied to real situations. Nor did most regimes take easily to visions of community that differed so radically from earlier understandings of the bases for community or society.

When an imperial government that had largely relied on alliances with local elites began instead to differentiate peoples by means of language use or religion, the change wreaked havoc on previous social alliances, threatening as it did the traditional shape of local social relations. In reaction to such policies, a local elite social group (like those Baltic German-speakers) often redefined its own traditional social status more consciously in terms of linguistic, religious, and cultural traditions rather than according to the privileged functions it had played within the empire. Local social groups could respond both defensively and opportunistically to the ideological and political spaces created when regimes invoked nationalist, cultural, or religious definitions of community. In the Prussian partition of Poland, for example, the government eventually came to use the issue of popular national identity as part of a larger strategy to undermine the power of traditional elites over the local economy. Constructing a greater sense of loyalty to their rulers based on language use or religious practice among the lowest classes, like the transfer of property from its former owners, appeared to

enhance the centralizing power of the imperial state. But such a strategy carried with it serious long-term risks linked to the mobilization of a mass base as well. In the Prussian case, policies of Germanization in the late nineteenth century only helped to produce a new, mass-based sense of Polish identity that spread well beyond the traditional members of the Polish nation (the gentry) to peasants, artisans, and workers. This created a much broader and more socially unified basis for opposition to the regime.⁴ At the same time, the Prussian regime's focus on policies of Germanization lent ammunition to its German nationalist critics, who contended that only the most extreme policies could effectively achieve the government's goals.

In the new German Empire after 1871, radical activists' own attempts to produce a stronger public appreciation for the importance of Germanness "from below" gained some reluctant support from local, state, and federal government agencies, particularly in multilingual regions. The *Kulturkampf* in its popular dimensions also contributed to the popularization of German nationalist efforts, since Polish nationalism in Prussia rested increasingly on identification with the local practice of Catholicism. Yet in Germany official government efforts to Germanize non-German-speaking peoples remained mitigated by practical concerns of state that outweighed the single-minded engagement of nationalist activists. Nationalist activists consistently demanded more radical policies of Germanization in the East precisely because they rarely gained the degree of financial or ideological support from the government for which they had hoped.⁵ In this case we can see that the popular discourses used to debate issues of nationalization and the radical proposals that became policy in the twentieth century did not dominate government policy in the nineteenth century. If the origins of extreme policies of nationalist citizenship can be seen in the nineteenth century, the particular ways in which they became policy in the twentieth century were certainly not inevitable or even foreseeable.

In the case of the Habsburg Monarchy, where political centralization also gradually replaced traditional reliance on local elites, state policy before 1848 was not defined in modern ethnic or national terms. As we shall see, however, linguistic policy linked to administrative centralization did help to produce the rise of mass national identities.

The popularization of German nationalist identities and politics in the Habsburg Monarchy in the nineteenth century proceeded from several complex sources. However, even as we examine processes of nationalization, we also need to consider a different and perhaps more vexing question. What, after all, did the term "German" as a signifier of identity mean to people in communities throughout Central and Eastern Europe? Who could be considered a German, and on what basis? By the end of the nineteenth century was there a common understanding among self-proclaimed Germans about what constituted their unique identity and who might share in it? When we invoke the term "German" or "German nationalist," we are

not using terms whose meanings are self-evident to observers or consistently defined throughout the region. Even to those who may have identified themselves as "Germans" in the nineteenth century, whether in the Habsburg Monarchy or in the eastern border regions of Prussia, the meanings of the term were hardly transparent, self-explanatory or uncontroversial. For today's reader, the term conveys a deceptively (easy) empirical sense of familiarity. We presume that Germans are easily recognizable when they appear in the historical record, and we know that they were present in several regions of nineteenth-century Central and Eastern Europe. Yet the empirical confidence we feel in the object of our research tends to dissolve upon closer inspection of the nineteenth-century individuals and communities who constitute the objects of our study. When the historical record yields examples of literate individuals who self-consciously referred to themselves as members of a larger German community or nation, these individuals usually defined their Germanness in ways that neither we nor self-defined Germans from other regions would necessarily find familiar. Germanness as a quality often signified a system of social and cultural values that helped people to mark their particular place in local society. The particularities of local conditions therefore often shaped local understandings of the term "German." The notion that Germans constituted a recognizable and well-defined group of people who shared a common sense of self-identification throughout Central and Eastern Europe derives largely from the efforts of nineteenth-century nationalist activists themselves who sought to create an interregional and unified German nation.

At the outset of the nineteenth century the term "German" would have been understood very differently in particular regions and at different levels of society. At one level the rise of a German literary culture in the eighteenth century spoke to a growing, socially relatively homogenous reading public across Central and Eastern Europe. At another level some activists passionately believed that the inhabitants of the various German states constituted a nation that could potentially form its own unified state to rival France or England. For others, as with Lutherans in northern Hungary or Galicia, being German meant professing a particular religious tradition in a region where most people practiced a different religion. Being German in Tyrol meant practicing a particularly orthodox form of Catholicism, while in Styria it often implied a skepticism toward the Catholic hierarchy.⁶ Inhabitants of other regions called themselves Germans because education in and knowledge of German culture constituted a local form of cultural capital that offered social status and mobility to those who adopted it. As a form of identity that was often situationally defined, when it was considered at all, Germanness rarely referred to qualities or interests that transcended a local perspective. This is especially evident from the nature of the task that faced German nationalist activists in both the German Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy: to convince Germans in individual localities to see themselves in terms of their commonalties with a larger interregional nation.

If those who saw themselves as Germans nevertheless used the term in diverse ways to express very different kinds of identities, should we treat them as constituting a single group? If, for example, people who could speak or read German did not think of themselves as Germans, can we usefully refer to them as Germans? We must recall that in the nineteenth century Germans as a group existed only as an analytic tool for our purposes and not as a substantial reality.⁷ This caveat also extends to those forms of difference that we presume must have constituted sources of difference in identity for nineteenth-century individuals. To imagine that certain social or cultural differences in the past inevitably produced the national differences we see in the present is to impose a national teleology on the evidence. If nations and national identities are invented, they do not necessarily need to be organized around some transhistorical local form of difference, as the work of several historians of the region remind us.⁸ In fact, the search for transhistorical differences (as a key to explaining later ethnic or national conflict) is an ahistoric undertaking that repeats the claims made by nineteenth-century “national awakeners.” They, after all, believed that awareness of differences needed only to be aroused among the broader population to produce inevitable forms of national consciousness. In fact, it is the processes outlined earlier, the interactions between state policy and local initiative that gave larger social meaning to local forms of difference like language use.

If Germans in the nineteenth century did not constitute a self-consciously bounded group of people, plenty of activists, social scientists, philosophers, and historians, among others, nevertheless worked hard to realize the goal of creating such a group. As the public sphere of political, economic, social and cultural engagement pushed beyond the walls of rural small towns in the nineteenth century, nationalist activists increasingly worked to forge popular group loyalties to a greater German nation that would be shared by an interregional public. Still, as scholarship on the nineteenth century concept of *Heimat* reminds us, when people called themselves (or others) Germans during the nineteenth century, they often used the term to refer to a set of shared qualities that remained defined by local circumstances and traditions. They did not necessarily think of themselves as part of an interregional culture.⁹

One avenue of approach to investigating the Germans in nineteenth-century Central and Eastern Europe is to analyze the changing popular meanings of the terms “German” and “Germans” as they were used at all levels of public life during the nineteenth century. In the next two sections of this essay I look at specific approaches to this question, one from 1848 and the other from the late nineteenth century in Habsburg Austria. Both of these historical moments witnessed renewed public debate over the meanings of “the Germans” and “Germanness,” and a few examples will suffice to show both the early diversity of meaning of the terms, and also the ways the use of the terms and their meanings changed over fifty years.

The conflicts over the meanings of a German nation in 1848 engaged a limited

stratum of society. The efforts of this stratum built in part on an appropriation of Habsburg state modernization processes that were rooted in moral, intellectual, and social reform visions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As Arnold Suppan points out in his essay, the eighteenth-century reform efforts of Maria Theresa and particularly Joseph II produced policies that treated the German language as the new *lingua franca* (to replace Latin) of the Habsburgs' culturally diverse holdings. The reformers' goals—to increase the coherence of administration, the productivity, loyalty, and moral capacities of their subjects through increased educational and economic opportunities—all produced policies favorable to German language use at every level of society, although not necessarily unfavorable to the use of other local languages as well.¹⁰

It is not difficult to see how early German nationalists conflated the reformers' focus on the *utility* of the German language with the alleged cultural and later the national *qualities* of those who used this language. German nationalists adopted this sense of cultural leadership in part as a political response to the claims of the Magyar, Polish, and later Czech nationalists who opposed Habsburg centralization and saw their interests best reflected in decentralized structures. The functional importance of the German language to the centralized empire became the foundation for several arguments promoting the political interests of German-speakers as such. But one should be wary of confusing the terms "German-speaker" with "German," since many Magyar and Czech nationalists in the early nineteenth century, for example, spoke German fluently, and did not define their nationalist loyalties in terms of their linguistic competence.¹¹ Furthermore, since the term "nation" had traditionally referred to a political corporation and not a linguistically defined community, it is not surprising to hear speakers of one language around 1800 declaring their loyalty to a nation represented by a different language. We have only to think of those urban German-speakers in the Prussian partition of Poland who proclaimed their loyalty to Poland against their region's absorption by Prussia.¹² Examples such as this also remind us that throughout the nineteenth century, differences in religious, regional, or class identification often determined social loyalties far more powerfully than differences in language use.

What range of cultural qualities did the term "German" connote in a local social context by 1848? Did it also refer somehow to an interregional community of Germans? The sudden profusion of public political debate unleashed by the revolution sharply conveyed diverse contemporary meanings of concepts like nation, Germans, Germanness, and Germany in the territories of the Habsburg Monarchy. Almost overnight, these concepts became an integral part of the popular rhetoric used to demand political, economic, and social reform in ways that had been impossible before the revolution terminated the *Vormärz* censorship regime. In 1848, most civically engaged people in Austria appear to have agreed that nationhood was inextricably

linked to the pressing issues of personal, community, political and social freedom. Most revolutionaries conceded that without the guarantee of such liberal freedoms, national consciousness could not be spread and national greatness certainly could not be attained. Many historians of 1848, however, tended to present liberalism and national rights as alternatives to each other, even if allegedly naïve political actors at the time did not understand the inevitability of this dichotomy. According to this version of events, individuals and parties eventually had to choose between their liberal and their national commitments.¹³ The 1848ers, however, did not understand the issues in quite such binary terms. Mid-nineteenth century activists more often than not conceived national development and political freedoms as mutually constitutive of each other. One could not exist without the other; these were not separate or separable issues. Most bourgeois nationalists (Czech, German, Slovene) believed that the development of their nation depended on the moral progress of their people, and such progress—to be accomplished above all through civic education—could not be guaranteed without the benefit of basic civil rights and the experience of political participation.

When the Viennese German nationalist newspaper *Schwarz-Roth-Gold* complained about peasant apathy to the nation in August 1848, it did so in terms that linked national identity inextricably to progressive political and moral values. “Traditional education made people stupid. The majority of Austrian peasants does not even know that there is a Germany and that it is their fatherland! . . . Traditional forms of education did not want to . . . provide our children with the example of the free men of their national past, out of fear that it would teach them [to think] independently.”¹⁴ It was the very quality of freedom that characterized everything having to do with nation, and this link of liberal ideas to national identity forged a concept of nation far different from the concepts we encounter around 1900. This may help us to understand why the statutes of several German nationalist organizations in 1848, for example, made membership available to “any Austrian citizen without regard to religion, nationality, or estate.”¹⁵ How could membership in a German nationalist organization be open to individuals of “any nationality?” Clearly the activists who formulated these statutes did not wish to limit membership in a German nation to those who were German-speakers or who felt themselves to be German, but rather opened their community to those who shared their cultural values and political commitment.

If political activists understood a German national community as one that was open to all who partook of their idealism, then the second point to understand about 1848 is how very few people actually shared a sense of national consciousness. Not only did very few peasants express a sense of national belonging, as the quotation above demonstrates, but those who did see themselves as part of a nation often defined that nation in highly parochial terms. The prominence of nation in public discussions

should not blind us to the deeply local ways in which it was conceived and understood. Rather than speak of the Germans in East Central Europe, when it comes to 1848 we can perhaps speak of those Tyrolers, Upper Austrians, Styrians, Bohemians, or Moravians who also considered themselves to be German. Activists who sought to spread national enlightenment to the peasantry in 1848 usually formulated their appeals in terms of highly localized interests. This constituted a strategic choice, but it also reflected the beliefs and experiences of the nationalists themselves. In very few places (Vienna, Graz) did discussions of nation transcend local understandings to incorporate broader political and social visions. When, for example, the young Karl Stremayr, a law student at the University of Graz, ran for election to the Frankfurt Parliament, a body whose task after all was the construction of a German nation-state, his speech to local peasant voters hardly mentioned Germany. Instead, he focused on the need to end the feudal economic system and the absolutist regime, and on his loyalty to the emperor.¹⁶

This situational understanding of nation also permeated discussions among activists who held more radical nationalist positions in towns where nationalist conflict between different groups had broken out. The Slovene historian Peter Vodopivec recounts one such example of local tradition shaping nationalist positions in southern Styria, where German-speakers and Slovene-speakers often lived in close proximity. In 1848, Slovene nationalists in Ljubljana/Laibach (in neighboring Krain province) demanded the creation of a new province that would unite all Slovenes in the monarchy. Several Slovene nationalists in Styria, however, opposed the division of their traditional province along national lines. Instead of creating a Slovene province with its own diet, the Styrian Slovenes promoted greater national reconciliation and equality among nations within Styria. A poem dating from 1848 and cited by Vodopivec captures a very different kind of nationalist agenda and includes the following lines (written alternately in Slovene and German):

How happy are we brothers,
in beautiful Styria,
we need not fear any ill,
our unity makes us strong,
the knowledge of both languages,
this promotes commerce,
to go our separate ways,
would harm us all.¹⁷

German-speaking deputies to the Styrian diet charged with creating a new provincial constitution reacted bitterly when Slovene nationalists displayed their Slavic red-white-and-blue colors publicly or founded a Slovene nationalist association in Graz, seeing such actions as public challenges to German and liberal ideals.¹⁸ On

the other hand, the German-speaking deputies in Graz treated Slovene *speakers* (as opposed to Slovene nationalists) as trustworthy political allies, agreeing to publish Slovene language translations of the diet's proceedings in local German newspapers in order to make the legislative session more accessible. "Many of the Slovenes who read the Graz papers are very intelligent people," noted one German liberal deputy to the diet, and appending the translations would "give them more trust in us."¹⁹

These examples suggest that at mid-century, local differences in language use did not define community relations and identities as fully as later nationalists believed they should. In 1848 local relations and familiarity still appear to have counted far more than any abstract interregional sense of nation. At the same time, if local differences in language use did not convey incommensurable differences, and bilingualism often appeared to be the norm, then local examples of intermarriage and social interaction between users of different languages would not have seemed remarkable either. For this reason too, definitions of Germanness remained open and vague, and liberal in their relations to other nations. Again, from the pages of *Schwarz-Roth-Gold*, one writer in July 1848 underlined this openness, claiming that membership in the nation "is based not simply on the soil of birth or language of culture, but rather on . . . nobility of action and the worthiness of conviction." Those who sought out education for themselves and their children and demonstrated their commitment to humanistic values could indeed *become* German. In fact, the 1848ers believed that this same set of moral qualities that defined their nation would enable it successfully to regulate relations among all the other nations within the Austrian Empire. "We want a German Austria . . . a powerful leader for all our brother nationalities, not through [coercive] power . . . but rather through the voluntary respect that we earn when we deal in freedom and humanity."²⁰

Yet even as German nationalists conceived their nation in open and liberal terms, they, and their counterparts in other movements, faced serious political issues that appear to us to have almost guaranteed the development of mutual antagonism among movements. The Herculean task of reconstituting political and social order on a new basis, as manifested in the efforts of the Frankfurt and Vienna (later Kremsier) parliaments, the short-lived Slav congress, the town councils and provincial diets, all but guaranteed that practical issues of language use would create a serious political bone of contention. German nationalists had trouble understanding the protests of those who sought to undo the earlier attempts to make German a *lingua franca* for the empire. It is perhaps a testimony to the narrow social basis of nationalist activists, men who had much more in common than they cared to admit, that they maintained a common vision of liberal freedoms in the Kremsier draft and refused to allow their efforts to be derailed by nationalist conflict. It was precisely the issue of language use in government and administration that created a space for the political activism that fundamentally divided nationalists by the late nineteenth century.

In the fifty years following the revolutions of 1848, far more people in the Austrian Empire became actively involved in a public sphere whose limits grew well beyond the boundaries of village or region. Nineteenth-century governments too, continued on the path of centralized state building that had been initiated by their reforming predecessors of the eighteenth century. In the aftermath of the revolution the Habsburg regime had even revived its efforts to impose greater coherence on regional and local administration through expanded use of German in the bureaucracy. This new insistence on German as the language of governance in the 1850s provoked effective opposition in Hungary. Government centralization in Austria, however, went well beyond language use in the civil service to encompass education reform, development of a transportation and communications infrastructure for the entire empire, and targeted investment to promote industrialization.

Constitutional reform in the 1860s loosened censorship, expanded public education and associational life significantly, and increased popular participation in politics. The expansion of communications and transportation infrastructures often recast political questions in interregional as opposed to local terms. Through the efforts of local associations, local media and political parties, more and more Austrians joined public life in some capacity or other. With the Compromise of 1867, the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy gradually adopted nationalizing policies typical of nation-states like France, Germany, or Italy. The empire that formed the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy, however, remained officially anational (later multinational). This state experienced a steady rise in mass political participation, culminating with the implementation of universal manhood suffrage for parliamentary elections in 1907.

In Austrian society, attempts to categorize and mobilize people in ethnic or national terms emerged from popular nationalist political initiatives after 1848 and not directly from the offices of government agencies. Nevertheless, the ongoing modernizing efforts of the state played a critical, if unwitting, role in the nationalization of Austrian society in the late nineteenth century. As nationalist political movements competed within the framework of the new constitutional system to increase their electoral constituencies in an age of growing mass-based politics, they sought to make the idea of national identity relevant to every aspect of life. They succeeded at least in nationalizing political life by demanding the application of constitutional guarantees of linguistic equality to an ever-expanding set of institutions. From educational to judicial institutions, from administrative to commercial practices, no possible corner of public life remained immune to the demands of nationalists. The late-nineteenth-century infusion of nationalist content into public life ranged from the provision of welfare benefits or access to education at all levels to local forms of economic competition and even to patterns of consumption.

To realize this nationalization of public life as fully as possible, however, each

group had to define a set of shared qualities that would help newly politicized Austrians to understand to which nation they belonged and why. Additionally, the dynamic of nationalist political competition within Austria after 1867 caused the leaders of each group regularly to insist that its needs were incommensurable with those of competing nations and that a gulf of enormous proportions separated the members of one nation from another. Such claims of differences among populations were made vigorously and often, in part because national belonging continued to mean very little to most nineteenth-century Austrians as they went about their daily routines. And while ordinary Austrians may have reacted with interest or indifference to claims about the importance of national loyalties, nationalist activists continued to develop and refine their claims about national differences, how they manifested themselves in daily life, and how they could be measured scientifically.

By 1900 both ideas about nation and the numbers of people who felt allegiance to nations had changed dramatically throughout East Central Europe. The character of ideas about Germanness changed too, in part because of the growing popularization of politics, in part because of the 1867 Compromise, which had recognized the rights of the Hungarian nation, and in part because of the activism of other nationalist groups in the empire, particularly the Czech nationalists. The role of the German language and culture as a broadly unifying factor in Austrian public life declined considerably as Slav nationalists agitated successfully in the legislatures and the courts for the use of their languages in schools, universities, the courts, and the civil service. German might remain the inner, interregional language of the imperial bureaucracy and of the military, but its advantages as a universal *lingua franca* in the region had diminished.

Many German nationalists clung uneasily to the traditional claim of German language and culture as somehow more culturally advanced and therefore more valuable than the other languages in public use in the monarchy. With the establishment of Polish and Czech universities at L'viv/Lwów/Lemberg and Prague, with Italian nationalist demands for an Italian-language law faculty and Slovene demands for a university in Ljubljana, the position of German as the undisputed vehicle of culture, progress, and modernity was less self-evident. As a result, German nationalist assertions of their nation's *Kulturträger* status in East Central Europe became increasingly strident. As German nationalists became more defensive about the position of their language and culture in the monarchy, they began to adopt new arguments to justify their leading position. They did not abandon arguments about the universality of their nation, and except for the anti-Semites among them, they continued to welcome anyone into its ranks. Yet at the same time, they articulated some new arguments that located specific spaces as German and that stressed the incommensurable differences that separated theirs from other cultures. Speakers of other languages, especially in the cities, seemed less and less likely to choose to become German for the sake of social

mobility, now that they had other options available to them in other languages.²¹ Consequently, the German nationalist community became more inward-looking and exclusive in its rhetoric. The greater German nationalist focus on national ownership of territory and on the fundamental differences that allegedly separated nations also derived from a growing appreciation of the importance of numbers, rather than of "quality" or cultural status, in influencing local and imperial politics. Elections had to be won if control by one nationalist group or another was to be exercised effectively. Although a curial system that favored wealthier and better-educated citizens dominated local municipal and regional elections, activists nevertheless sought to mobilize every possible voter in every curia for their purposes.²²

After 1848, many government policies of modernization depended on initiatives in the social sciences that sought to organize and map populations according to their linguistic and religious character, for the purpose of applying social policy more effectively.²³ Categorization of local populations according to language use in the imperial census, for example, became valuable tools for the development of local school and, later, welfare policies after the passage of the 1867 constitution in Austria. Since the constitution had promised equal treatment to the speakers of Austria's different languages, this required setting up schools in native languages wherever possible.²⁴ Over time, the implementation of this guarantee and its application to other areas of public life (courts, civil service) required increased statistical knowledge about the linguistic make-up of local populations.

In the 1870s, government statisticians developed a census apparatus that would question Austrians, among other things, about their language of everyday use.²⁵ The imperial government had no wish to promote nationalist agitation or the importance of national identity, however indirectly, through the census. Yet its attempt at linguistic categorization for limited policy purposes produced several unintended side effects, including new opportunities for nationalist politicians. Statistical studies like the decennial census did not automatically produce nations through a kind of Foucauldian effect, but they certainly did produce new opportunities for nation-building, which creative nationalist politicians readily exploited. In early debates over the particular form of the census, nationalists had complained vigorously that it asked respondents for their language of daily use instead of for their mother tongue or their nationality. The nationalists' failure to impose national categories on the census, however, did not daunt activists in the least. They simply used other tools at their disposal—press, political agitation, mass meetings—to link language usage in the census to broader, newly invented mass nationalist identities. The nationalists appropriated census categories like "language of daily use" in order to mobilize people on the basis of common qualities. Already in the 1880s, following the first Austrian census, activists claimed that all those who had listed a particular language on the census form belonged in fact to that nation. This claim, and the counter-claims it

provoked, produced powerful effects in Austrian public life. By 1910 many more people believed the language question referred to their nationality—a fixed personal identity—rather than to the *function* of language in their locality. Nationalist activists even turned to the courts to challenge the census results for particular localities where they believed the national enemy had somehow manipulated the outcome.²⁶

If nationalists complained that the census did not explicitly ask for the national allegiance of its respondents, historians might complain that it made no allowance for the many people who used *more* than one language in families, businesses, or daily social lives, to report that critical fact. We have no way of knowing whether any of these respondents in fact spoke the language of another nation as well. We historians have also validated nationalist claims about the census, however inadvertently, by reading it ourselves as if it somehow revealed national self-identification among the Austrian population. Histories of the Habsburg Monarchy or East Central Europe invariably include maps depicting the languages that a majority of people reported in a particular region. Almost always these maps identify their subjects as “the Czechs,” “the Germans,” or “the Slovenes,” for example, rather than as “Czech-speakers,” “German-speakers,” or “Slovene-speakers.”²⁷ This slippage on the printed page—from the individual who reported a single language of daily use in the census to the presumption of national identity—transforms all people into members of nations, whether they felt that way or not. From there it is a small step to territorialize those nations by assigning to them the geographic regions where they appear to have constituted a majority.

Instead of accepting nationalist claims that associated language use on the census with a declaration of national identity, historians might more fruitfully ask what factors induced some respondents to report one language in a given year instead of another language. How might we explain the choices of those individuals, families, and communities who self-consciously practiced a form of bilingualism, marrying their German language skills to Czech, Slovene, Polish, or Hungarian (or marrying their Czech skills to an acquired knowledge of German)? In some regions we know that the same people reported different languages of daily usage in different decennial censuses.²⁸ What situations caused them to report one language one year and a different language ten years later? Considering these questions in a nineteenth-century context might help us to avoid presuming that such people had already developed a single and consistent sense of national identity. It would also encourage us to follow Rogers Brubaker’s productive suggestion that we think of individual national professions of identity—professions of nationness—as an occasion or as an event rather than as an ongoing process or an unchanging, internalized truth.²⁹ Finally, keeping these questions in mind would help us literally to *see* things differently when we examine the abstract depictions of social scientists that map language use onto territory.

If we consider the information that these abstracted maps, graphs, and charts fail to convey to us (bilingualism, situational reporting of linguistic usage), we can see one reason why it is so difficult to speak of Germans, German communities, or a German nation in nineteenth-century Central and Eastern Europe. Other kinds of choices made by individuals, families, and communities also undercut the clear assertion of national identity proclaimed for them by contemporary nationalist activists. Why, for example, did some parents in multilingual regions choose to rear and school their children in more than one language? Nationalist activists tried to square their version of reality with the social behaviors they encountered by denouncing such people as "amphibians," "national hermaphrodites," and as psychologically deformed opportunists who would sell themselves and their children to the highest national bidder. Or they depicted such people as the unfortunate pawns of oppressive employers and landlords who forced them to adopt a different language from their authentic one in order to save their job or their apartment.³⁰ By speaking and writing in these terms, nationalists sought to normalize the concept that everyone indeed had one authentic national identity. To us, however, the example of people who did not easily fit into a nationalist schema points to the fundamental difficulty of presuming that language use in the nineteenth century implied a particular national community identity.

Although more people clearly saw themselves as Germans, as part of a larger German nation by 1900, the significance of that choice and the meanings with which they imbued this choice also remained diverse and often contradictory. The generally swift rise of popular literacy and newspapers throughout the empire meant that people far away from each other received their news from sources that presented it in a uniform context. Far more people who adopted a national identity now shared a comparable sense of the meaning of their Germanness and who belonged to their community, than earlier in the century. Nevertheless, regional loyalties remained powerful when it came to those definitions, and activists often scrambled to paper over several conflicts about the character of the German community that had emerged by 1900. Two particularly vexing questions that prevented the formation of an ideologically unified German nationalist movement involved the role of Jews and the Catholic Church within that movement. Several organizations and parties defined their German identity in terms of racial, religious, or economic anti-Semitism. Several, including the largest among them, remained open to Jewish membership and to a non-racial definition of the German community. Many German nationalists in a region like the Tyrol (like Christian Socials in Lower and Upper Austria) continued to define their community identity in terms of loyalty to the Catholic Church, whereas German nationalist organizations and parties elsewhere saw the Church as their nation's enemy. When these latter organizations attempted to unify their efforts, as with the first Congress of German Nationalist Defense Organizations in 1908, for example, they could not achieve the hoped-for

unity, precisely due to the powerful disagreements about these issues, particularly the role of Jews.³¹ While it is true that far more Austrians saw themselves as belonging to a German nation in 1900 than had been the case in 1848, they did not agree at all on the character or meaning of this nation.

This essay has attempted to demonstrate that terms like “German” or “nation” carried far more diffuse and locally based meanings for diverse nineteenth-century populations than they did to Germans at various points in the twentieth century. The study of context, of historical contingency, and of individual circumstance is key to determining what individuals and communities adopted what national identities over time. So is the idea of nation-ness as event rather than identity. When and in what kinds of situations in the nineteenth century did people tend to see themselves as national? In what kinds of situations were they indifferent or ambivalent about the idea of belonging to a nation? Individuals, families, or even communities may have adopted national identities at certain moments, but that did not prevent some of them from adopting different identities at other moments, or from expressing complete indifference to those identities at yet other moments. Even those who did identify themselves consistently as “Germans” throughout this period would not necessarily have understood themselves as members of a larger interregional German community, one that formed an interconnected, unified cultural and social whole. Their sense of their Germanness may have derived from their particular religious practice, their local social position, or their degree of education. In the context of specific regional and local identities there may indeed have been plenty of self-described Germans to be found, but little sense of a larger connection among such groups of individuals. Imposing the common term “Germans” on these diverse populations risks compromising the accuracy of our representations of people in the past by flattening out their considerable differences to fit them into a broad modern category.³²

It is also clear, however, that the requirements of modernizing states and the efforts of developing social sciences worked together, however unintentionally, to promote the categorization of populations in terms of language use, religious practice, and eventually according to the abstract concept of nation. While state policies did not alone create nations in the nineteenth century, they often created the available political and social spaces where local or regional activists could articulate particular interests. Even states like Austria, whose policy opposed the recognition of national interests, nevertheless helped to produce the spread of nationalism through promises of linguistic and religious equality. The most egregious example of Austrian state policy that unintentionally encouraged the process of nationalization of populations was undoubtedly the Moravian Compromise of 1905. Undertaken in order to diminish the harmful effects of political nationalism on public life, the compromise created separate Czech and German electoral lists and school systems. The new law required, however, that all Moravians register themselves and their families as either members of

the Czech or German nation, thus forcing many who had not previously considered themselves to be part of either nation to join one of them.³³

From the perspective of the twentieth century, the history of the nineteenth century in Central and Eastern Europe seems to offer a panoramic view of worsening relations among neighboring communities that used different languages or practiced different religions. What we are seeing, however, is neither the awakening of nations nor the end of some kind of idyllic existence characterized by an acceptance of diversity or so-called hybrid identities at the local level. The largely rural communities of East Central Europe in particular knew nothing of hybridity or multiculturalism because they knew nothing of modern nations. What they experienced in their everyday lives was completely normal to them and not exceptional. What was exceptional to them, however, was the gradual intrusion in their world of outsiders, of civil servants, of communications and commercial networks, of new media, of political parties. Even in 1848, when popular politics first exploded the cultural fabric of daily life in the region, the potential for all-consuming nationalist conflicts to tear society apart remained only a potential. Activists in 1848 were not the activists of 1900. The former still defined their world in tangible ways that privileged local interests and interpretations of the world. For this reason, their nationalisms did not necessarily exclude other nationalisms, and given the legal and social conditions of the day, most envisioned a society characterized by personal emancipation. By 1900, however, local conditions had changed radically, thanks to the spread of media, the rise of literacy, and a remarkable political mobilization. So too had the contents of nationalist ideologies. Local interests were now understood by more people to be intimately connected to nationalist interests. A broad and abstract concept of nation (whichever version) had become part of loyalty to the traditions of place, making local conflict on nationalist lines more of a possibility in daily life.

Notes

1. For an excellent analysis of recent literature on the nationalization of Eastern European populations, see Larry Wolff, "Revising Eastern Europe: Memory and the Nation in Recent Historiography," *Journal of Modern History* 78 (March 2006), 93–118.
2. For an excellent account of an early attempt to categorize populations according to ethnicity through the use of identity cards, see Laird Boswell, "From Liberation to Purge Trials in the 'Mythic Provinces': Recasting French Identities in Alsace and Lorraine, 1918–1920," *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2000), 129–162. On the question of identity cards producing identities that mark people for death or expulsion, see Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven, 2002); Gerald Stourzh, *Die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten in der Verfassung und der Verwaltung Österreichs, 1848–1918* (Vienna, 1985); and Tara Zahra, "Reclaiming Children for the Nation: Germanization, National Ascription, and Democracy in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1945," *Central European History* 37, no. 4 (December 2004). The latter two works examine judicial records in Imperial Austria to illustrate the different

ways that ethnic attribution and national ascription became embedded in nineteenth- and twentieth-century legal categories.

3. A fine account of the process in West Galicia is Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848–1914* (Ithaca, 2001). See also Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton, 2002).
4. For a good account of the relationship between the Prussian government's policy of Germanization and the rise of a strong and self-conscious Polish nationalist movement in West Prussia, see Ralph Schattkowsky, "Nationalismus und Konfliktgestaltung. Westpreussen zwischen Reichsgründung und erstem Weltkrieg," in *Die Nationalisierung von Grenzen: Zur Konstruktion nationaler Identität in sprachlich gemischten Grenzregionen*, ed. Michael Müller and Rolf Petri (Marburg, 2002), 35–79; Schattkowsky, *Identitätenwandel und nationale Mobilisierung in Westpreussen und Galizien* (Marburg, 2002).
5. A superb analysis of the situation in the region around Posen in Prussia is Thomas Serrier, "'Deutsche Kulturarbeit in der Ostmark'. Der Mythos vom deutschen Vorrang und die Grenzproblematik in der Provinz Posen (1871–1914)," in *Die Nationalisierung von Grenzen*, 13–33.
6. The local meanings Tyrolers assigned to Germanness, meanings that differed in the extreme from concepts of Germanness in Bohemia or Styria, for example, are analyzed by Laurence Cole in *"Für Gott, Kaiser, und Vaterland." Nationale Identität der deutschsprachigen Bevölkerung Tirols 1860–1914* (Frankfurt a/M, 2000).
7. Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 7–12.
8. See especially Gary Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914* (Princeton, 1981); King, *Budweisers*.
9. Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990); Alon Confino, *The Nation as Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill, 1997).
10. Peter Bugge, "Czech Nation-Building, National Self-Perception and Politics 1780–1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aarhus, 1994), 16–21; Hugh LeCaine Agnew, "Czechs, Germans, Bohemians? Images of Self and Other in Bohemia to 1848," in Nancy M. Wingfield, ed., *Creating the Other: Ethnic Conflict and Nationalism in Habsburg Central Europe* (New York, 2003), 56–77.
11. On the ignorance of the Hungarian language among some Hungarian nobility, see the first chapter of Istvan Deak's engaging *The Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians, 1848–1849* (New York, 1979). On knowledge and use of the Czech language in early-nineteenth-century Bohemia, see Bugge, "Czech Nation-Building."
12. Michael Müller, "Zur Identitätsgeschichte deutschsprachiger Gruppen in Grosspolen/Provinz Posen und dem Königlichen Preussen/West Preussen vor 1848," in *Die Nationalisierung von Grenzen*, 6.
13. In a thoughtful consideration of the multiple ways in which historians have framed the events of 1848, historian R. J. W. Evans notes that while the causes of the revolution were international in nature, they have been remembered largely in national terms. Given the development of national historical traditions later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the original contemporary understandings of the events of 1848 have often been lost. R. J. W. Evans, "1848 in Mitteleuropa: Ereignis und Erinnerung," in *1848. Ereignis und Erinnerung in den politischen Kulturen Mitteleuropas*, ed. Barbara Haider and Hans Peter Hye (Vienna, 2003), 31–55.
14. *Schwarz-Roth-Gold*, 22 August, 1848.
15. "Statuten des deutschen konstitutionellen Vereins in Teplitz" (Bohemia) in Österreichische Nationalbibliothek: Flugblätter- und Plakate- Sammlung, 1848–1871.

16. Carl von Stremayr, *Erinnerungen aus dem Leben* (Vienna, 1899), 18–19. Stremayr later served in liberal cabinets in the 1870s as Minister for Religion and Education, and for a brief period as Prime Minister in a transitional cabinet.
17. *Celske novine*, 24 August 1849, quoted in Peter Vodopivec, "Mythos und Wirklichkeit des slowenischen Jahres 1848," in *1848. Ereignis und Erinnerung*, 243.
18. Gerhard Pfeisinger, "Die Revolution von 1848 in Graz" (Ph.D. diss., University of Salzburg, 1985), 103–106.
19. *Verhandlungen des Landtages Steiermark*, 14 June, 1848, 12–13.
20. *Schwarz-Roth-Gold*, 11 July, 1848.
21. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 138–139.
22. Pieter M. Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries: Liberal Politics, Social Experience, and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848–1914* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 193–266.
23. See several of the essays on the categorization, territorialization, and quantification of national populations in Wingfield, *Creating the Other*.
24. Hannelore Burger, *Sprachenrecht und Sprachgerechtigkeit im österreichischen Unterrichtswesen 1867–1918* (Vienna, 1995).
25. The best critical history of the Imperial Austrian census remains Emil Brix, *Die Umgangssprachen in Altösterreich zwischen Agitation und Assimilation: Die Sprachenstatistik in den zisleithanischen Volkszählungen 1880 bis 1910* (Vienna, 1982). For an illuminating study of the debate over whether or not to allow respondents to list more than one language of daily use, see King, *Budweisers*, 58–59.
26. The most famous of these challenges involved the census results for the city and region of Trieste, where a recount was ordered by the government. Brix, *Umgangssprachen in Altösterreich*, 194.
27. Most recently, Robin Okey, *The Habsburg Monarchy c. 1765–1918: From Enlightenment to Collapse* (New York, 2002), xii reproduces such a map, although Okey at least points out that the regions are assigned to various nationalities on the basis of their majority, rather than their sole presence in given regions. Okey's map is labeled "Nationalities of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1848."
28. See the excellent discussion of census-taking by Cohen in *Politics of Ethnic Survival*, especially 86–139.
29. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (New York, 1996), 16–19; Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 12–13.
30. On nationalist debates over children, bilingualism, and school choice, see Zahra, "Reclaiming Children for the Nation"; and Zahra, "Your Child Belongs to the Nation: Nationalization, Germanization, and Democracy in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1945" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2005).
31. *Verhandlungsschrift über den 1. Deutschen Schutzvereinstag in Wien am 3., 4., 5. und 6. Jänner 1908*, Vienna, 1908. The German School Association, the German League for the Bohemian Woods, and several organizations in Moravia refused to adopt anti-Semitic membership requirements, whereas the Südmark and the League of Germans in Bohemia were overtly anti-Semitic in their platforms and policies. On the issue of anti-Semitism in the German nationalist movement, see Pieter M. Judson, "'Whether Race or Conviction Should Be the Standard: National Identity and Liberal Politics in Nineteenth-Century Austria,' *Austrian History Yearbook* 22 (1991). On Catholicism and German nationalism in the Tyrol, see Cole, "*Für Gott, Kaiser, und Vaterland*." The issue of nationalist relations to the Catholic Church was also highly problematic for the Czech nationalist movement, especially in the early years of the First Czechoslovak Republic. See Cynthia Paces, "Religious Heroes for a Secular State: Commemorating Jan Hus and Saint Wenceslas in 1920s

- Czechoslovakia,” in *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe*, ed. Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield (West Lafayette, 2001), 209–235.
32. Pieter M. Judson, “When Is a Diaspora Not a Diaspora? Rethinking Nation-Centered Narratives about Germans in Habsburg East-Central Europe,” in *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness*, ed. Krista O’Donnell, Renate Bridenthal, and Nancy Regain (Ann Arbor, 2005), 218–247.
33. King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*, 114.